

## GRAND STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH OTHER STATES IN THE *NEW, NEW* WORLD ORDER

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**T**he art of statecraft has often involved efforts to improve the security of one state by taking advantage of the power and influence of other states. This is, for example, why a state typically seeks to forge military alliances with others. It is also why some states provide economic and military support to client or dependent states and why some advocate the formation of multistate trading blocs. The theory behind the trading-bloc strategy is that cooperation on security matters is more likely when there are strong economic and other mutually beneficial connections among the members of the bloc. Among the tools that have been and are being used to influence other states are trade preferences, loans, loan guarantees, concessionary pricing for military sales, export-import financing, technical assistance, foreign aid, and international disaster relief.

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While humanitarian altruism is a major factor in foreign aid and disaster relief, statesmen often see the reduction of suffering as a method of improving the stability of a recipient state or as an inducement for a recipient state to cooperate more fully on security matters.

Many ideas for making American foreign policy more effective have been offered in recent years. Some of them involve ways of prioritizing all forms of official, state-to-state assistance on those states whose stability or cooperation will most benefit the national interests of the United States. Obviously, there are

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many states that are already stable and already do generally cooperate with the United States. Canada, Japan, and the states of Western Europe (disagreements over the second war with Iraq notwithstanding) fall into this category. Certainly the economically advanced and politically stable states of the collective “West” have a common interest in suppressing the signal threat—global terrorism—of the *new*, new world order that sprang from the rubble of the World Trade Center and Pentagon on 11 September 2001. Thus the real focus of foreign policy reform proposals is on the large number of states that are neither as economically advanced nor as stable as Japan, Canada, and Western Europe.

Three general approaches have been proposed for identifying the states outside the “winner’s circle” of economically advanced and stable states whose cooperation and stability contribute most to the national interests of the United States. Each of these approaches—as should be expected, because of the emphasis of all on state-to-state relations—is realist in its assumption that the state is the most important actor in world affairs and thus that working through and with other states is an effective way for the United States to further its national interests. The general approaches would respectively devote the lion’s share of state-to-state assistance to one of the following groups of states:

- Lever, or pivotal, states through which the United States can promote stability in a region and thus tamp down the threat of terrorism
- Buffer states that can be strengthened to become more effective insulators against terrorist attacks upon the United States and its interests
- Failed or failing states, the restoration of which to functionality would eliminate platforms from which terrorists might plan, prepare, or launch attacks upon the United States or its overseas interests.

Each of these options is based on distinctly different assumptions about the role that other states can play on the world stage and about the type of contributions that they can make in the global war on terror. This article examines these assumptions and finds that they are in some important respects inconsistent with security threats that will face the United States in the early twenty-first century.

#### PIVOTAL STATES

In the late 1990s, after the Cold War but before the global war on terrorism—that is to say, during the original new world order and before the *new*, new world order—the notion of pivotal states enjoyed considerable support, because it recognized something that should have been, even if it was not, intuitively obvious. That something was that it made sense for the United States to organize its

foreign policy priorities so as to ensure that states that deserved a lot of attention got a lot of attention, and conversely that states that deserved less attention got less. The approach, proposed by Professor Paul Kennedy and other authors, may appear somewhat dated now, but it is based upon an enduring principle—that state-to-state assistance would be most effective if it were targeted at states that would then exert favorable (to American interests) influence regionwide. The general rule for determining whether a state deserved a good deal of attention boiled down to the following: if a state’s successes and failures had major ripple effects on neighboring states, that state was ipso facto a pivotal state.<sup>1</sup>

The pivotal-states strategy calls to mind the saying, “When Brazil [or any dominant state] sneezes, Argentina [or any smaller neighboring state] catches

cold.” Brazil was, indeed, designated by Paul Kennedy and his coauthors as a pivotal state by virtue of the size of its population and economy relative to neighboring states, and Argentina’s economy did indeed actually

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“catch cold” when Brazil devalued its currency in 1999. Obviously the pivotal-states strategy aims at the positive effects that a pivotal state can have on its neighbors.

According to the strategy, the United States should target its foreign aid, economic preferences, concessionary military sales, and technical assistance on the “Brazils” of the world and at the same time reduce its aid and assistance to other states, including their nonpivotal neighbors—for example, Argentina. Extending the health analogy, the strategy called for the United States to give vitamins to Brazil in order to promote rosy cheeks in both Brazil and Argentina. To do otherwise, Kennedy and his coauthors argued, would spread state-to-state assistance so thinly among a large number of recipient states that no single one would get enough aid to make a real difference.

The image projected by the pivotal-states strategy is proactive. The strategy seeks to influence regionally dominant states precisely because those states *are* regionally dominant. They are pivots because they extend muscular tentacles of economic, cultural, political, and ideological influence into their respective hinterlands. Perhaps because of this focus on relatively powerful states, this strategy implies a high level of respect for the sovereignty and national interests of the recipient states.

Like all of the strategies discussed here, the pivotal-states strategy is easier to describe than to execute. It assumes that decisions about import quotas, tariffs, and foreign aid will actually be made (or perhaps only wishes they would be

made) on the basis of foreign policy considerations alone. The reality is, of course, often quite different. Such decisions are political judgments and will always be heavily colored by estimates about their likely effects on domestic constituencies. Higher quotas and lower tariffs are inevitably evaluated and voted up or down on the basis of their impact on the U.S. economy and, more particularly, on domestic American industries—often with only scant regard for their potential effects on a pivotal state in a distant region of the world. President George W. Bush’s March 2002 decision on steel import tariffs is a good case in point. Although it has since been rescinded, the tariffs were very clearly designed to support the domestic steel industry regardless of its effects on foreign trading partners. Similarly, decisions about where to invest foreign aid or even sell military hardware at concessionary prices are always influenced by political pressures from constituency groups, be they individuals who want to extend the helping hand of foreign aid to whoever needs it regardless of the overall foreign policy, or industry representatives and labor lobbyists who want to maximize sales whether the opportunities are in high or low-priority markets.

Moreover, circumstances change, often in ways that disrupt the best-laid plans of strategists. For example, Afghanistan was never considered a pivotal or even moderately important state until after the Taliban refused to turn over the 11 September terrorists. Nevertheless, the country is getting a considerable share of American nation-building and peacekeeping resources. This seems to indicate that it would be impossible for the United States to adhere to any spending priority list over time.

On the other hand, a truly rigorous concentration of foreign aid, trade preferences, and intensive technical assistance, etc., on a very small number of pivotal states can have profoundly positive effects on a region. This was the case in postwar Germany and Japan, and it appears to be the strategy the United States is following with respect to Iraq. The objectives of the very heavy investment in postwar reconstruction in Iraq clearly include the stabilization of the Middle East region as a whole and the promotion of political and economic reform in neighboring states—including, of course, states with unrepresentative regimes that have been sponsoring terrorism or at least not acting effectively to suppress it.

Focusing on only one or two pivotal states (for example, Iraq and Afghanistan) amounts to a *pivotal-regions* strategy (or in this instance, *region*), a substantially different approach in that it does not identify pivotal states in every major region or focus aid on them as levers for the promotion of American national interests around the world. For the time being, considering the Greater Middle East as the pivotal region may make good strategic sense. The Middle East is, in fact, a crucially important region at this point, because it is the ideological and financial wellspring of Islamic extremism, and because its oil

resources play such an important role in the world economy. Nonetheless, the reconstruction project in Iraq will one day be completed, internationalized, or abandoned, and when that day comes questions about whether state-to-state aid should be concentrated on pivotal, buffer, or failed states will reemerge.

### **BUFFER STATES**

Buffer-states strategies also envision that the United States would provide greater amounts of economic, political, and military support to some states than to others, but in this strategy the priority traditionally has been states that can solidify the local status quo, rather than states with resources that can be leveraged into greater influence over events in distant regions.

For example, the Soviet Union established the Warsaw Pact in order to provide a “cordon sanitaire” between the motherland and the West. Stalin’s cocooning strategy clearly viewed the Eastern European satellites as insulators between the core of the Soviet empire and the sources of economic, cultural, and ideological contagion in the West. He saw the satellites also as shock absorbers that could contribute to the preservation of his hard-won empire by serving as first lines of defense in the event of a military attack by NATO. Ironically, before World War II some Western European leaders had viewed the very same Eastern European states as buffers against Bolshevism. Until the dawn of the nuclear age and now the global war on terrorism, the oceans were thought to constitute all the buffers that the United States needed, although there have occasionally been arguments for prioritizing aid to Mexico so that it could better protect the United States against infiltration and mass migration from Central America.

The image projected by buffer-states strategies is reactive. Buffer-states strategies aim at local, not widely dispersed, states. Their contributions are defensive, and their ability to project economic, cultural, political, and ideological influence over other states is immaterial.

Lately there has been interest in a strategy that appears to combine aspects of both the buffer and pivotal-states strategies. This “seam states” strategy was formulated and effectively articulated by a Naval War College colleague, Dr. Thomas P. M. Barnett.<sup>2</sup> As envisioned by Barnett, the seam-states approach forms part of a larger strategy involving improvements in homeland security and proactive interventions in nonseam states. Barnett’s seams resemble the fault lines between civilizations or cultures that were envisioned by Professor Samuel Huntington in the early 1990s;<sup>3</sup> however, Barnett’s lines in the sand are fewer in number, more fluid, and more heavily based on secular phenomena than were Huntington’s cultural fault lines.

The seams represent the dividing line between two figurative tectonic plates. One plate contains the states that are connected with, or are attempting with at

least some success to connect with, the “West” through globalization. This plate accounts for approximately two-thirds of the world’s population, and it represents, in Barnett’s schema, an economic and political winners’ circle of relatively stable and prosperous states. The other plate represents the remaining one-third of the world’s population who reside in states that are disconnected, or are deliberately disconnecting themselves, from the evolving norms, practices, and institutions of globalization. Barnett argues that in the *new*, new world order this is where the main security threats originate. The threats may be from a state (North Korea), a terrorist group sponsored by a state (Hizbollah), or terrorists acting completely independently of a state (al-Qa’ida), but in each instance the threat is assumed to emanate from an entity based on the second tectonic plate.

According to this strategy, states along the seams between the tectonic plates are potentially important because they can serve collectively as a barrier inhibiting the ability of terrorist networks on the second plate to attack states on the first plate—but not every state on the seam is equally important.

Twelve of the most important seam states are designated by Barnett for priority attention. The twelve would get more economic, political, and military assistance from the United States; other advanced countries and other seam states would get less. Of the twelve most important seam states, Professor Kennedy and others earlier identified seven as pivotal states.

- *States (seven) on both the pivotal and seam-states lists:* Algeria, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, South Africa, Turkey
- *States (five) on seam-states list only:* Greece, Malaysia, Morocco, the Philippines, Thailand
- *States (two) on the pivotal states list only:* Egypt, India.

Although the focus of this essay is on the overall strategies, rather than nuts-and-bolts decisions about which states warrant higher priority, the list of key seam states does invite comment. Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines share maritime borders primarily with each other and land borders with only four states: the first-plate states of Singapore and Brunei, the second-plate—but nonthreatening—state of Papua New Guinea, and Thailand, which is designated as another key seam state. In effect, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines do not actually abut any significant segment of the seam between the first tectonic plate and the second. This suggests that these three states are designated for priority attention for some reason other than their status as seam states, which in turn may raise questions about the assumptions upon which the strategy was built. It seems clear that the region as a whole is what is strategically important—the vast expanse of ocean, a huge number of islands, and heavily

trafficked sea-lanes that Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines individually govern—not the ability of the three states to serve as buffers between the first and second tectonic plates.

Despite the high degree of overlap between the seam-states and pivotal-states lists, the seam-states strategy is, in fact, more closely aligned philosophically with the buffer-states approach. The seam and buffer-states strategies concentrate state-to-state assistance on a selected number of states that have primarily defensive functions and may or may not be able to project economic, cultural, political, or ideological influence at the regional level. In this strategy, influence is projected beyond the seam by the state that provides the assistance in the first place—the United States.

In concluding that the key seam states could function as effective barriers against terrorist networks, the strategy makes two important assumptions. One is that the seam states actually provide some sort of physical barrier between the first and second plates; the second is that terrorist networks would actually have

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to transit the barrier in order to attack the United States or one of its neighbors on the first tectonic plate. Both of these assumptions are questionable, given the nature of modern transportation net-

works and the relatively small volume of men and materiel that terrorist organizations would actually have to move from one location to another in order to attack a state in the winners’ circle. As long as commercial airlines fly to places like Kabul and Khartoum and ships dock at ports in South Asia and West Africa, terrorist organizations will be able to fly over or sail around whatever barriers the seam states provide.

The strategy also assumes that the key seam states are now or soon will be (after having received state-to-state assistance) physically capable of controlling their borders and exerting on-the-ground control over remote internal regions. This indeed would seem to be the sine qua non of the strategy, for if a state cannot control its own territory, it can hardly serve as an effective barrier against intrusion or movement between the second and first plates.

At least four (Pakistan, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brazil) of the twelve key seam states long ago demonstrated the inability to assert control over remote internal areas or effectively police their land and sea borders. Terrorists having already established bases of operation in three of them—Pakistan, the Philippines, and Indonesia—it is clear that none has presented a major barrier to terrorist networks in the past. Enough incidents of terrorism continue to occur in each of these countries (a March 2003 bombing in the Philippines’ second



biggest airport, the August 2003 hotel bombing in Jakarta and the October 2002 bombing of a Bali resort in Indonesia, and the intermittent terrorism in Kashmir conducted or supported by Pakistani groups) to raise doubts that any of the three will become effective barriers any time soon. Although there are as yet no signs that the fourth, Brazil, is home to anti-American terrorist base camps, there are serious questions about the extent of Brazil's effective control over its remote interior sections, in particular near the western borders with Colombia and Peru and the southern frontier with Paraguay and Argentina.

The seam-states strategy envisions a robust program of state-to-state assistance (military sales, military advisers and trainers, foreign aid, technical assistance on law enforcement and government reforms, and favorable trade agreements) to help key seam states improve and extend their governing capacities so as to prevent second-plate terrorists from attacking first-plate targets.

A program of this magnitude is daunting, to say the least, and unlikely to be resourced adequately. Moreover, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Brazil, and perhaps other key seam states ultimately lack sufficient incentives to exert themselves seriously in underpopulated rural zones; all face more direct challenges in their overcrowded cities. Demographic trends suggest that the urban challenges will get worse, not better. Pakistan, Indonesia, Brazil, the Philippines, and also Malaysia have vast land or maritime borders that are virtually impossible to control without unaffordable increases in their security budgets. For example, the coastlines of Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines total about sixty thousand miles—five times the length of the coastline of the United States. It is hard to envision Indonesia, Malaysia, or the Philippines ever being able to control effectively more than a tiny percentage—that is, ever being truly effective at the role that the seam strategy envisions for them.

### FAILING STATES

Failing-states strategies are of a completely different order than pivotal, buffer, or seam-states strategies. Theoretically, pivotal and buffer-states strategies target other states as being relatively capable of either projecting influence regionally or acting as barriers against intrusion by third parties. Failing states are capable of neither, and it is their very incapacity that causes some strategists to believe that they warrant high priority in state-to-state assistance.

Failed states have been variously defined. Some definitions include states that have simply ceased to exist and have been succeeded by others. For example, under some definitions the Austro-Hungarian Empire would be a failed state, because the geography and population centers once administered as one entity by the Hapsburgs are now administered by successor states. By this yardstick, the term “failing state” could have applied to the Soviet Union during the late

Gorbachev and early Yeltsin eras. For the purposes of strategies for dealing with current and future security issues, such inclusive definitions are useless; a state's failure is often positive in terms of U.S. national interests, as for example when a state that sponsors terrorism fails or, as in Iraq, is made to fail. A state's failure can also leave behind successor states that are politically stable, administratively competent, or connected with the norms of the economically advanced states on the first tectonic plate. Some of the Soviet Union's successor states (Russia, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia) fall into this category, as do a number of Hapsburg successor states (Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary).

A more pertinent definition focuses on sovereign states that exist on paper as members of the United Nations and thus are candidates for state-to-state assistance but that have ceased to provide basic government services to their citizenry, often because of internal strife—as in Somalia in the early 1990s and Liberia in 2003. Initially of concern because of the humanitarian consequences of civil wars, forced starvation, and human rights abuses, failed states have come to be seen by some as launching pads for terrorists and major criminal organizations as well as wellsprings of destabilizing refugee movements and breeding grounds for virulent diseases.<sup>4</sup>

Quite a few scholars and government officials have burned a good deal of tread off their tires trying to devise taxonomies for failing states. This veritable cottage industry attempts to identify warning signs that might enable the international community to intervene early enough to prevent other states from failing. The theory behind these efforts is that concentrated state-to-state assistance for states in danger of failing will prevent failure and thereby:

- Eliminate opportunities for terrorist and criminal organizations to establish bases of operations
- Remove the incentive for refugees to flee into other countries
- Enable law enforcement, humanitarian, and public health agencies to expand their operations and thereby gradually improve living conditions and prevent the spread of crime and disease.

It is clear that the internal chaos and anarchy of failing states do indeed create fertile breeding grounds for crime, human rights abuses, disease, and starvation. But notwithstanding the assumptions of this strategy, it is much less clear that the conditions in failed states actually offer better opportunities for terrorists than do conditions in certain functional states.

For example, states that actively sponsor terrorism with money, police protection, or weapons and that share intelligence reports about impending antiterrorist operations tend not to be failing. Such “services” may simply not be

reliably available in a failing state. States that are genuinely failing are not typically well connected with Western intelligence sources and are thus usually not in a position to obtain or leak advance warning to terrorists. Further, they often exert little control over the internal security forces that might be expected to provide protection to terrorist base camps. Moreover, failing states may be viewed by terrorists as being unable to provide more than token resistance to antiterrorist incursions by neighboring states or special operations units from Western states. Failing states may even be seen by terrorist organizations as incapable of distinguishing between antiterrorist incursions and indigenous violence—and thus as unable or unwilling to offer even stout legal defenses of their sovereignty.

This is not to say that terrorists do not operate or establish base camps in failing states. They do. However, the issue for strategists seeking to prioritize the investments in state-to-state assistance is not whether there are terrorist organizations in failing states. For strategists the issue is whether the terrorist organizations and operations in failing states are more dangerous to the United States than terrorist organizations and operations in functioning states.

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Fund-raising by terrorist organizations is one aspect of this issue. It has been noted that terrorist organizations finance their operations through criminal activity in failing states. For ex-

ample, there have been reports that al-Qa'ida has been trafficking in diamonds smuggled from the failing states of Liberia and Sierra Leone.<sup>5</sup> The profits that al-Qa'ida earns from reselling diamonds apparently help finance the group's operations and enable it to maintain its communications network and purchase weapons. Obviously, anything that enables groups like al-Qa'ida to finance their operations ought to be of substantial concern to strategists, but it should be remembered that the problem is hardly unique to failing states. While smuggling is considerably easier in a failed state that cannot control its borders, goods are also smuggled out of functioning states (e.g., diamonds from Tanzania, drugs from Colombia, small arms from Russia), and the profits from these enterprises can also finance terrorist groups. In fact, criminal enterprises inside functioning states can also generate funds for terrorists. Even in the United States, terrorist operatives or their sympathizers have engaged in illegal activity (such as smuggling cigarettes from low-tax states like North Carolina for resale in high-tax states like New York, embezzling from charities, extorting money from legitimate businessmen and families) in order to raise funds for terrorism.

Another factor to consider is that the most serious recent terrorist attacks on first-plate states have been based either in the first-plate state itself or in a state that was not considered to have failed. The bombings in Indonesia were reportedly undertaken by an Indonesian terrorist group, and the 11 September attacks on the United States sprang from a complex of headquarters, training camps, and weapons caches in Afghanistan. On 10 September 2001 most observers felt that Afghanistan under the Taliban suffered from too much government, not too little. The Taliban might have failed to improve the living conditions in Afghanistan, but it did control enough of the country to make al-Qa'ida view the Taliban government as a sound strategic partner—one that would be able to assert state sovereignty and provide protection to al-Qa'ida operations. None of the individuals indicted for the March 2004 terrorist bombing in Spain was from a failing state—in fact, most were from one of the designated seam states, Morocco.

Events in Afghanistan and Indonesia strongly suggest that in terms of the war on terrorism, the threat posed by groups in failing states is no more serious than the threat posed by groups operating in lightly governed (or ungovernable) zones inside functioning states. As noted above in connection with the seam-states strategy, the phenomenon of remote and only nominally administered rural or coastal zones inside functioning states is already a serious problem in some parts of the world. As urbanization continues to deplete rural populations and force national governments to concentrate on governing cities, the phenomenon may become more widespread.

### THE LURE OF ELEGANT CATEGORIZATIONS

This article has sought to compare and contrast the assumptions and conceptual approaches embedded in three broad strategies for maximizing the benefits the United States receives from state-to-state assistance programs. None of the three represents an adequate strategy for dealing with the security threats of the present day and age.

Each of the three depends heavily upon the ability of strategists to perform two functions well: first, to decide which states are more important than others in terms of their contributions to the “bottom line”; and second, to adhere to the designated priorities over extended periods of time, not just a single fiscal year. The difficulty of actually performing both tasks well should not be underestimated. Judgments about where the United States should invest its time and money are inherently and inescapably political, and in practice they are likely to reflect domestic considerations as much as strategic calculations. Political pressures from domestic interest groups and unanticipated developments overseas will not only shape the original priority list of recipient states but cause our

investment patterns to diverge from whichever strategy is officially adopted. In the unlikely event that an elegant game plan were actually adopted, it would not be long before we began to violate it.

Moreover, each of the general strategies reflects assumptions about the role of other states that may be inappropriate for the security threats posed in the *new*, new world order. Indeed, it may well be that the very idea of categorizing states according to the role that the United States would assign them (extending a stabilizing influence over a region, serving as a barrier against external threats, reestablishing stability over the territory of a failing state) is misguided, because of the quicksilver nature of the terrorist threats emanating from “beyond the seam.” As we have seen, at least some terrorist groups seem able to disperse and reorganize (perhaps under different names), relocate at great distance (al-Qa’ida’s relocation from Sudan to Afghanistan is the best example), and quickly form partnerships of convenience with groups in other countries, including first-plate states like Great Britain and France. The pivotal states, buffer/seam-states and failed-states strategies plod in comparison. By the time state-to-state assistance has had its hoped-for effects on a pivotal, key seam or failing state, the terrorist organizations will have moved on to other locations from which they could base operations, devise new routes for attack on the “West,” or forge new alliances with dissident groups inside first-plate or seam states.

The pivotal, buffer, and seam-states strategies each more or less assumes that all states that are categorized as high priority will play roughly the same role. For example, a seam-states strategy assumes that once having received state-to-state assistance, all of the key seam states will at least attempt to serve as effective barriers to third-party threats. If this assumption were not made, there would be no logical reason to pursue the strategy in the first place. It is also assumed that a state could be a pivot or a nonpivot, but not both—a seam state or a nonseam state, but not both.

The problem is that at least some of the states that would be designated as pivotal and key seam states have characteristics of failing or beyond-the-seam states. That is to say, several of the pivot or key seam states contain zones where they have simply failed to exert effective control. These ungoverned or very lightly governed zones (such as the fastness of Pakistan’s mountainous border with Afghanistan, where Osama Bin Laden has reportedly been managing to avoid capture and orchestrate terrorist actions in first-plate states), out-of-the-way islands in Indonesia, dense patches of jungle in the Philippine archipelago, and the isolated interior of Brazil are already home to terrorist organizations and could provide bases of terrorist operations in the future. Many of these pivot or seam states have pressing social problems in overpopulated cities and are not highly motivated even to attempt to play the role scripted for

them in the pivot and seam-states strategies—to assert control over remote and dangerous regions. In some of these states, governance is a delicate balancing act among ethnic minorities or religious factions. Their rulers may well see their own interests as being best served by lip service to the role of pivot or buffer.

Given these considerations, the lure of grand strategies based on elegant categorizations of states should be resisted. A more effective approach would be to do more of something we do not do enough of today—allocate security-related assistance to other states on the basis of that state's potential contribution to specific high-priority projects or functions in the war on terrorism. Examples are the collection and sharing of intelligence information about terrorist organizations, law enforcement action against indigenous terrorist groups with affiliations to al-Qa'ida, suppression of illegal fund-raising activities by terrorist organizations, and effective regulation and monitoring of financial transfers that support terrorist organizations.

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#### NOTES

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